

Love Transforms Everything

Mary Lenaburg - 2025-01-30

INTRODUCTION: We welcomed back Mary Lenaburg for the third time as she gave a talk on waiting and love. Originally her talk was to be an Advent talk, addressing the season of holy waiting. Even though we are no longer in Advent, all of us are in a season of waiting, we are waiting for something. Love transforms that season. Waiting is never easy. We wait all the time, and we do not like it because it stretches us, refines us, and makes us painfully aware that we are not in control. As an aside, Mary warned us to never pray for patience, or the Lord will give us a super-abundance of situations requiring patience! Life is full of seasons of waiting. We wait for answered prayers, we wait for clarity in a situation, we wait for healing, we wait for dreams to take shape, we wait for love, we wait for reconciliation, we wait for the day when the weight of grief finally eases, we wait for our coffee to be hot, we are always waiting... In all of this waiting, we are not called to a passive kind of waiting, but to one that is active, one that leans into hope.

HOW WE ORDER OUR LIVES: We order our lives with our intellect at the highest level, which informs our emotions and they inform our actions, and our actions lead to results. Mary saw a similar pattern in the cardinal virtues of faith, hope and love. Faith is the knowledge that God is God and we are not, and He has our good in mind at all times. This faith is like our intellect. Hope is more an emotion, but it is also a thought, an intellectual decision. When we have the knowledge that God is God, we have the hope that God is going to do what He said He is going to do, which leads us to love. And what is love? Love is an action! Love is a choice. It is all rightly ordered. When we live our lives in this right order, rather than doing what we want with our lives, we allow the Holy Spirit to do what He needs with our lives.

SEASONS OF WAITING: The Season of Advent reminds us waiting is sacred. Lent is also a time of sacred waiting. These times of waiting are not wasted times, nor are they times of idle longing. They are a space where God is at work in the unseen. Advent, Lent and personal seasons of waiting are where we are preparing our hearts to receive Christ. In Advent, He comes to us in a cradle. In Lent, He comes to us on the cross, and so we make our way to the cradle, to the cross. We too come in a cradle, and we carry many crosses. And the Lord is constantly asking us to lean on Him a little more, to not be so self-sufficient. He is here, He has already done it: the war has been won. Can we walk with Him in victory? We have many seasons of stretching where we are called to wait, to trust and to surrender. We surrender not with resignation, but with faith and hope, an expectation of good things, of "God things."

JUST DO THE NEXT RIGHT HOLY THING: Waiting is not about standing still, it is about preparing, believing, taking the next step in faith. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton used to say "Just do the next right holy thing." It can be doing the dishes, helping a neighbor, being with grandchildren, folding someone else's laundry... It is not all about big, bright, shiny things, it is about having the disposition of the heart to serve. It is about keeping our hands open for what God will give us. Most of all, waiting is about hope, it is about believing that God is already at work. He is NOT passive. He is in there with us, in the muck, in the mire, in the heart, in the grief, in the tragedy with each of us. Mary knows this kind of waiting intimately well. Her new favorite word is bittersweet. In the bittersweetness of life, the bitter and sweet occur together, and create something beautiful.

COURTNEY: Mary shared that 10 years ago she spent the longest season of waiting she had ever known. Her daughter Courtney was nearing the end of her life. This beautiful child suffered from grand mal seizures, which began at her baptism and were daily events all her life. These, compounded with some of the medications she was prescribed, resulted in her being profoundly disabled. Mary gave a beautiful TASTE talk about Courtney and family life as caregivers which can be found [HERE](#). Her daughter died at age 22, at the developmental age of a 9-month-old child. For each grand mal seizure she experienced, the family never knew if it would be her last. This stress took a toll on all, Mary, her husband and their son. Even with all the difficulty and hardship, Courtney was the heart of the home. She never had to do anything to earn their love; she mirrored the love we have with God, Our Father. There is NOTHING any of us can do to earn God's love – He loves us because He made us. We are here because we are a thought of God, constantly. And He gave His life for us, each one of us. All of us are here because we are being loved in this moment by God the Father, by Jesus, who holds us as His beloved, and by the Holy Spirit who is actively here with us.

LOVE LETS GO: We do not know when or how we will be called to the Lord. Time is precious, and it is a thief. The time we have here on earth is but a blink in eternity, so we are called to make the most of it. We are called to live and all of us have one job: Our one job is to love, to love the person right in front of us in each moment. We are here to love, and love is about hope, not in a dream, not in an idea, but in the person of Jesus Christ.

In September of 2014, the family learned that Courtney's body was beginning to shut down. So they knew the upcoming Advent season would be her last. Their last Advent with Courtney was a time of great anticipation, not just for Christmas morning, but for the final road on a sacred journey, one that taught Mary, and continues to teach her, the depth of love, the beauty of surrender, and the ache of knowing that love does not hold on, it lets go. Love is about pouring out. We cannot give what we do not have. That is why we have to know who we are in Christ, and Whose we are. We love because we were taught to love. Love is meant to let go, and have no expectation that it will be returned. That is why it is called sacrificial love. Love lets go because it is not about what we want, it is about conforming our will to God's, knowing that He knows better. It is for our good and His glory, always.

Courtney taught Mary a lot about love. Her life was a reflection of pure, selfless love, the kind that asks for nothing in return, the kind that transforms us without our even realizing it. Love had changed Mary in ways she had never expected. It softened her sharp edges, it broke her open and healed her at the same time. It prepared her for the hardest good bye she ever had on earth, because she knew that love would never end.

WAITING AT THE END OF LIFE: During that final Advent season together with Courtney, they did all things they had always done during Advent. They baked, decorated, lit the Advent wreath, played Christmas music, wrapped gifts: they did the next right holy things! Every moment felt like a gift. Every prayer carried an eternal weight because the waiting was heavier, but it was holier. It is the same kind of waiting that happens at the end of every life, the suffering before the healing. In those moments, Mary truly understood the crib and the cross. Jesus came to us as a helpless infant, love incarnate in the most unexpected way. There were no riches, no fanfare. He came with nothing, but the fullness of love to give, to give of Himself totally and completely. And 33 years later, that same love carried Him to the cross where He gave everything for us. Love does not just arrive in the easy and joyful moments, it walks us through suffering, it transforms both the cradle (the beginning) and the cross (the end) joining them together in a story of redemption. That same love met Mary in her waiting, in the long nights of prayer, in the quiet tears, in the aching hope that even in this loss, God was still writing a greater story for Courtney's life, for her own, and for her family's. Love was preparing her heart to receive what was coming if she could not fully understand it. Love is the only thing that can transform a season of great suffering and sorrow into one of pure grace. It takes our deepest aches and reshapes them into something holy that reaches beyond us and our own understanding.

EXPANSIVE LOVE: Love by its very nature is expansive, it is a gift to be given. It stretches, it grows, it multiplies, it transforms the giver and the receiver. True love, God's love, demands action. Love starts in the heart, it begins in that quiet place where He first meets us, where we come face to face with the reality that we are loved beyond measure. But love is never meant to be contained within us. It is meant to spill over into our lives, shaping the way we live, the way we speak, the way we forgive, the way we serve. Love teaches us patience, so we do not have to pray for it! Love teaches us kindness when our natural inclination is indifference. Love reminds us that every moment in every conversation and every sacrifice and every act of service is an opportunity to choose love. Love costs us something, and that is a good thing. We should never be afraid of the cost because Jesus gave everything. He taught us how to love with His own life. Why do we strive so hard to do all the things to prove our worth and our value? We are seen, we are known, we are loved because of who we are. We are beautiful, we are precious. There is dignity in us. We must own it, and walk in that freedom. He earned it for us. For us to hold our heads high and live our lives in love and service to others is saying to God that we see Him, and we thank Him and we are going to do our best. At the end of the day, the question to ask ourselves is "How well did we love today?" Love radiated from Courtney. She never spoke a word, but her presence changed lives. She taught Mary that love does not have to be complicated. It does not require grand gestures or perfect timing. It can be found in the simplest of moments, the way we hold someone's hand, the way we sit in silence when someone is hurting, the way we chose to keep showing up even when it is difficult. Courtney's love continues even now to move outward though those who knew her and knew of her. Love refuses to be contained. It keeps growing and it keeps moving and it keeps reaching places we could never have reached on our own.

LOVE & WAITING: God is a God of miracles. He takes the broken, and recreates, renews, and restores. And then He says go out into the world and tell people how to love. Go out into the world and tell people that death does not win. We have to choose to live, to be in the present. We all have things that cause grief in our lives. We have to have Good Friday in order to have Easter Sunday, but in between is Holy Saturday, a day of waiting. Our Lady knows all about the pain of losing a child, and she knows all about waiting. And she knows all about love. Do we live like we believe in the cross and the resurrection? Or do we give into doubt and worry and anxiety and question what God is doing? Many people ask Mary how she can be so joyful, how can she laugh, how can she go on with life. She quotes St. Paul at the time of his conversion: "What would you have me do?" She misses Courtney every second of every day. When there is breath in our bodies, there is still work for us to do! We are meant to love, and we love in the way we are given to love. We, the women of TASTE, are holding up the church, by our prayers, our sacrifices, our holy hours, our rosaries. And it is in our sacrifices, and our loving, our community, and our church that we are teaching the next generation who will step into our shoes and hold up the church when we breathe our last.

CONCLUSION: Love is never meant to stop us. It is meant to go forth, to spread, and to transform. It is meant to be the thing that sets us apart, the thing that points us back to the One who is Love Himself. If we are in a season of waiting, (which we all are), we are not alone. God is in the waiting, He is in the quiet night when prayers feel unanswered, He is in the ache and the longing for something better, for something more. Love changes everything. It becomes a beacon for a world desperate for hope. Waiting is not a punishment, it is a preparation, it is the space where love deepens, where faith is tested and refined, where we learn what it truly means to trust. Waiting is choosing every day to believe in God's goodness, even when the path is unclear. It is knowing that our prayers are not ignored, that every longing we lift to the heavens is heard, every prayer that rises up will be answered in His time, and that every tear is counted.

As we prepare to go into this next liturgical season of waiting, let us also prepare our hearts to love as He loves us. And as we wait, let us remember that no season of waiting is ever wasted when we place it in the hands of Love Himself. Hope is in the waiting. And the waiting is never empty. It is the place where love is made perfect, where faith is strengthened, where trust is refined. Love is a journey, and at the end of the journey, in the humble manger or at the cross, Love waits for us with arms open wide.